Stories from Islamic History

SAYYED ABUL HASAN ALI NADWI

UK ISLAMIC ACADEMY

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ISBN 1 872531 14 8

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Published by
UK Islamic Academy
P.O. Box 6645
Leicester LE5 5WT
United Kingdom

Website: www.ukiabooks.com
E-mail: info@ukiabooks.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Design and Typesetting: Sohail Nakhooda

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Foreword

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

This collection of short stories from Islamic history is from the pen of the renowned scholar Sayyed Abul Hasan 'Ali Nadwi. Each story has been selected to illustrate a facet of the character of a true believer. The messages contained in the stories have withstood the test of time and will be of interest and benefit to young readers of today.

Many Muslim pupils in the West have been denied access to books which stimulate a love of Islam and pride in its principles. Instead they are drawn towards attractively presented non-Islamic books which offer a lively format but no moral guidance. The stories in this volume have been translated from Arabic into a modern easy-to-read style to fill a gap which exists in Islamic education in the English-speaking world.

A wealth of biographical matter has been utilised by the author to highlight significant events in Islamic history. Before the publication of this volume much of this material was not available to young Muslims, their parents and teachers, who crave for more stimulating literature in English. The stories demonstrate the courage, chivalry, determination and sacrifice of Muslims who refused to deviate from the Straight Path, and they encourage the reader to reflect upon and to discuss such exemplary behaviour.

Young Muslims will find that these succinct stories from a long period of Islamic history are often set in circumstances not far removed from those they experience today. They will discover role models from the *Sirah*, from the time of the Caliphs and from events which took place when Muslims lived under colonial rule.

My thanks are due to sister 'Aishah Bewley, sister Umm Ayman, my daughters Su'ad, Shifa' and Asma' and my other children for their help in producing this book. May Allah accept this effort and make it a source of inspiration and guidance for all.

Leicester, England
Sha'ban 1426 AH
September 2005

Iqbal Ahmad Azami

Preface

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds, and blessings and peace be upon the master of the Messengers and the Seal of the Prophets, *Sayyidina* Muhammad, and on his family and all his Companions and whoever follows them in doing good and in calling to the way of Allah until the Day of Rising!

Teachers and psychologists agree that light, stimulating stories with a purpose are one of the best means of instruction. When such stories reflect the pillars of faith, certainty, religion and revelation they provide a rich framework for their readers. From stories that are pitched at the level of the pupils' understanding and in a language which they can easily grasp and enjoy, high moral standards, ethics and principles can be taught more successfully.

There is nothing more lasting and truthful than the words of Allah Almighty in His Mighty Book: '*There is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding*' (12: 111).

Allah addresses His Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace: '*So relate the story – perhaps they may reflect*' (7: 176).

At the beginning of Surah Yusuf, He says: '*We do relate unto you the most beautiful of stories, in that*

We reveal to you this Qur'an: before it, you too were among those who knew it not' (12: 3).

That is why, in most languages and literature, those concerned with teaching children to be of good behaviour and possessing the best qualities use stories to stimulate their pupils.

Today, Muslim children and youth have an even greater need than any previous generation for stories which cultivate the qualities of goodness, virtue, heroism, sacrifice, *jihad* and martyrdom in the way of Allah. They need to see the reasons for preferring the Next World to this world and for abandoning foolishness and excess. Above all, they must have a love for Allah and the Messenger and his Companions and their followers and for those who devote themselves to the way of Allah, who protect the *din* and defend the Muslims. Happiness and success in this world is based on a sound upbringing, being constantly aware of the power of Allah and living an exemplary life.

Islamic history is a rich treasure-house. Scholarly libraries are full of masterpieces depicting Islamic belief and morality. Yet, young Muslims have few books at their disposal that contain stories and pictures from the wealth of Islamic history. There is a great need for a series of books from which Muslim children can learn of their heritage and which can strengthen their appreciation of Islam. The effect of this knowledge will

remain in the hearts of today's children as well as those of subsequent generations.

Allah has enabled the author to present this volume of stimulating stories from the books of *sirah*, and from Islamic history and biographies. Allah has already given him the success of writing a series called 'Stories of the Prophets' for children. It is renowned in scholarly circles in the Indian subcontinent and Arab countries, and is praised and admired by men of education.

The author has chosen new subjects from historical texts and adapted them into a simple style suitable for children. This book containing twenty stories is the first step towards further collections of similar and equally valuable stories.

The author hopes that his efforts will enrich the existing Islamic library through this special selection for children which contains a wealth of material of moral, religious and educational value.

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

I

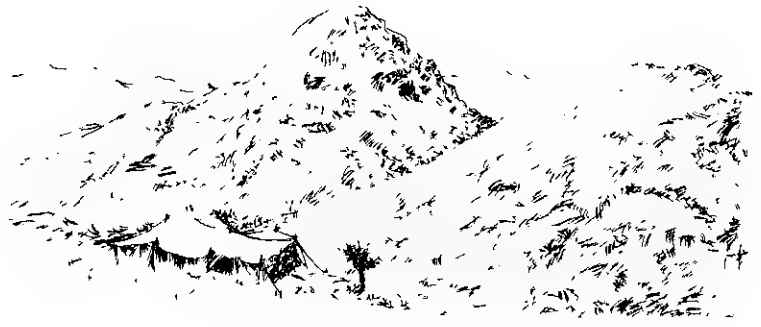
Allah Protects His Messenger

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was born in Makkah. His family had lived there for generations. At that time, the people were worshipping idols and had strayed from the path of Allah. Because ignorance and injustice was so widespread, Allah gave his chosen Prophet, Muhammad, His Message to take to the people.

Allah commanded the 40-year-old Muhammad to call the people to return to the worship of the One True God and to follow His path. The leaders of Makkah, however, rejected this new message. They wanted to keep their easy, immoral lifestyle. They persecuted Allah's Messenger and his followers in an attempt to prevent them influencing the people.

Because of the great difficulties that Muhammad and his few followers encountered in trying to establish Islam in Makkah, Allah decided that His Messenger should settle in Madinah, a city in which Islam could flourish more easily.

When Allah gave His Messenger the command, he and his Companion, Abu Bakr, set out from Makkah in



secret. The idol-worshippers followed their tracks but the two of them managed to reach the Cave of Thawr in a mountainside between Makkah and Madinah. They took refuge in this cave.

Allah sent a spider to spin a web between the mouth of the cave and a tree outside which hid the Messenger of Allah and Abu Bakr from their enemies. Allah also commanded two wild doves to build their nest in the tree. '*To Allah belongs the armies of the heavens and the earth*' (48: 7).

The idol-worshippers came right up to the mouth of the cave. If they had looked inside they would have found their quarry, but Allah confused them. When they saw the spider's web at the cave entrance, they assumed that no one could have entered the cave without breaking the web. They also decided, upon seeing the doves building their nest so close to the entrance, that they would have been frightened away if anyone had

entered the cave. They decided that the cave was empty and moved away.

Abu Bakr, inside the cave, saw the idol-worshippers and said: 'Messenger of Allah, if one of them were to stand on tiptoe, he would see us.' The Messenger of Allah said: 'What do you think of two people when Allah is the third of them?'

Allah Almighty says about this incident: '*The two were in the cave, and he said to his companion, "Do not sorrow. Allah is with us*"' (9: 40). Once the idol-worshippers had left, the Messenger of Allah and Abu Bakr continued their journey.

The Messenger of Allah settled down in Madinah and the people answered his call to Islam. ﷺ

2

'I Have Come From the Best of People'

As the faith of Islam spread, the Quraysh and the idol-worshippers in Makkah grew more annoyed. They were determined not to allow Islam to influence their way of life and they started to attack the peaceful Muslim community in Madinah.

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, had no alternative but to organise the Muslim community so that it could defend itself from the enemies of Islam. They had to fight the idol-worshippers and unbelievers for the sake of Allah Almighty. Fighting in this way is called *jihad* and is a praiseworthy action.

Sometimes the Messenger of Allah would accompany the Muslim army on an expedition against the enemy to attain *jihad* in the way of Allah. When he was returning from one such expedition at midday during the summer, he wanted to rest and sought shade. In the desert the only shade to be found is under a tree but there are not many shady trees in Arabia. He could only find an acacia tree.

He hung up his sword on a branch of the tree. The Muslims with him split up and found other places to sleep while he slept under the acacia tree.

An idol-worshipper, one of the enemy, by chance came across him and saw the Messenger of Allah's sword in its scabbard hanging up in the tree. He grabbed the sword and unsheathed it. The Messenger of Allah then woke up. Sword drawn, the idol-worshipper demanded: 'Are you afraid of me?'

The Messenger of Allah said: 'No.'

The idol-worshipper asked him: 'Who will protect you from me?'

The Messenger of Allah replied: 'Allah.'

At this the sword fell from the idol-worshipper's hand and the Messenger of Allah picked it up and asked the idol-worshipper: 'Who will protect you from me?'

The idol-worshipper answered: 'No one. You can be the best capturer!'

The Messenger of Allah said: 'Do you testify that there is no god but Allah and that I am the Messenger of Allah?'

'No', said the idol-worshipper. 'But I will make a pact with you. I will not fight you and I will not accompany anyone else who comes to fight you.'

So the Messenger of Allah let him go. The idol-worshipper went straight to his companions and told them: 'I have just come from the best of people.'

3
A Generous Host

The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and his Companions emigrated from Makkah to Yathrib (later called Madinah) where they settled down. They left their families, homes and property in Makkah which meant that they had emigrated, so they were called the '*Muhajirin*' or 'Emigrants' when they arrived in Yathrib. The people in Yathrib, who had already accepted Islam, met them with cries of 'Welcome!' because they were so pleased to see them.

They put up the new arrivals in their homes and gave them a share of their property and land. Allah and His Messenger called the people of Yathrib the *Ansar* which means the 'Helpers'.

The *Muhajirin*'s response to their generosity was: 'May Allah bless you! May He allow you to prosper, but we do not need your land and property. Show us where the market is and we can trade there to make a living.'

That was what they did. They went to the market to buy and sell and Allah made them rich quickly. Yathrib became the City of the Messenger of Allah. Everyone

calls it *Madinatur-Rasul*, the City of the Messenger or al-Madinah, which means 'the City'. Madinah became the unique city of Islam.

This city was the focus of Muslim emigration. When anyone became a Muslim and his own people persecuted him, he would emigrate to Madinah to be safe.

Madinah was the school of Islam. When anyone accepted Islam, they had to learn its rules. They had to know the Qur'an. They had to learn how to pray and to fast. They also had to learn the meaning of *halal* (lawful) and *haram* (unlawful).

Muslims came to Madinah from every part of the Arabian peninsula. Some of them were fleeing to safety from the enemies of Islam, but others came to learn the *din*, the Islamic way of life. All of these people were the guests of Islam. The Messenger of Allah was always delighted to greet them. 'Welcome!', he would say warmly. He would want to show them his respect and to feed them because they were the guests of Allah, of His Messenger and of Islam.

The Messenger of Allah, however, had few worldly goods. He was not interested in possessions. Sometimes he would eat, sometimes he would go hungry. When he ate he would give thanks to Allah. When he went hungry he would be patient. Although he may not have lit a fire in his house or had food prepared, he would

never let his guests go hungry. He said: 'Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should honour his guest.'

The Muslims in Madinah lived as if they were one family and Madinah was one house. When guests arrived, the Prophet distributed them among the Muslims who took them into their homes and offered them hospitality.

Among the *Ansar* was a man named Abu Talhah al-Ansari. He loved Allah and His Messenger and the Messenger of Allah enjoyed his company. Abu Talhah had a cool, shady garden which had sweet water. The Messenger of Allah liked to sit in this garden and drink the cool water.

One day he went to Abu Talhah's garden with Abu Bakr where they sat and drank the refreshing water. When Abu Talhah came along he was so happy to find them there that he went to sacrifice a sheep for them. The Messenger of Allah said: 'Do not sacrifice an ewe, one with a young lamb or one that gives milk.'

Abu Talhah sacrificed a suitable sheep for them and cooked it. They ate the meat and drank the water and praised Allah. The Messenger of Allah prayed for Abu Talhah's well-being.

On one occasion when guests arrived in Madinah, the Messenger of Allah shared them among the Muslims as usual. Each of them, including Abu Talhah, took

home some guests. Abu Talhah loved to have guests because they were the guests of Islam and he was hoping to gain the pleasure of Allah, of His Messenger and the reward of the Next World.

When Abu Talhah took his guests home he did not know whether he would find enough food for them in his house. He did not know what his wife, Umm Sulaym, had cooked, nor how much, nor whether his children had eaten. He had not stopped to think about what he would find at home.

Abu Talhah strolled down the road with his guests, happy and joyful. He knocked at the door to let his family know he was there. 'Peace be upon you! Can I come in?' A voice from inside said: 'And upon you be peace! Come in.'

Abu Talhah went in and announced: 'I have the guests of the Messenger of Allah with me.'

Umm Sulaym responded to the news cheerfully. She said: 'Welcome to the guests of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.'

Abu Talhah asked: 'Is there any food?'

Umm Sulaym, showing no signs of anxiety, answered: 'Only enough for the children.'

Abu Talhah wondered how he could feed his guests when there was so little food in the house. However, he soon thought of a solution. A generous person always finds a way.

If Abu Talhah went hungry that night he could feed his guests. Umm Sulaym had also resolved to miss her meal so that there would be enough food for their guests. They knew they would not die from going hungry for one night.

But how could the guests be persuaded to eat when their host did not? Abu Talhah soon thought of a way.

He said to Umm Sulaym: 'When we sit down to eat, go to the lamp as if you are going to adjust it but put it out instead.'

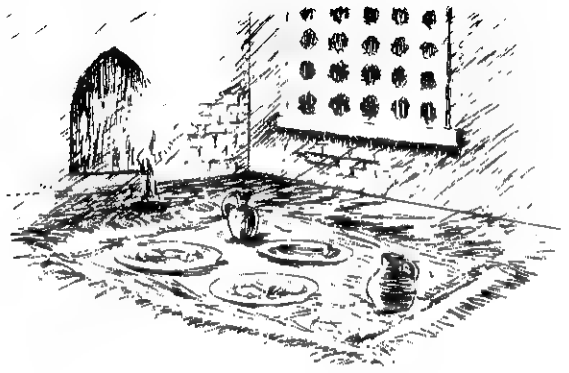
The guests sat down to eat and Abu Talhah sat down with them. Umm Sulaym went to the lamp as if to adjust it and then she put it out.

The guests started to eat in the dark. Abu Talhah had been stretching out his hand to the plate when the lamp went out, but now he removed it and did not take any food. He pretended that he was eating, but did not eat anything.

The guests thought that he had eaten. Why should they doubt it? They ate until they were full and thought that he had done the same. But Abu Talhah had not taken a single bite in the darkness.

The guests rose and washed their hands. They praised Allah and prayed for blessings for their host. Abu Talhah also got up and washed his hands.

The guests spent the night feeling contentedly full while Abu Talhah spent the night feeling hungry but



happy. He was grateful to Allah that he felt more satisfied that night than he had on many previous nights.

Abu Talhah did not think anyone else knew what he had done. He thought it was a secret known only to himself and his wife, Umm Sulaym. But Allah knows about secrets that are hidden even better than this one. Allah sent down a Qur'anic verse: '*but give preference to others over themselves, even though poverty was their lot*' (59: 9).

The Messenger of Allah asked about the story that lay behind this verse and Abu Talhah told him what had happened. The Messenger was happy to hear about such self-denial and generosity. He was well pleased with Abu Talhah.

This story still exists as part of history and tafsir, may Allah be pleased with Abu Talhah. ﷺ

4
The Prophet's Mosque

Soon after the Messenger of Allah, may Allah belss him and grant him peace, had moved from Makkah to Madinah he wanted to build a mosque for the new Muslim community. A mosque is vital because around it Islamic life revolves.

At first, the Prophet stayed in the house of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, but so many people visited the Messenger of Allah that he felt it would be better to move into new quarters. There was a yard nearby which he thought would be a good site for a mosque. First, he had to find out who owned the yard that he wanted to build on.

A local Muslim named Mu'adh ibn 'Afra' told him: 'It belongs to two orphans. One is called Sahl and the other Suhayl.'

The Messenger of Allah asked for Sahl and Suhayl, the two orphans. When they came, he asked them about the yard and what price they would want for it Sahl and Suhayl replied: 'The site is for Allah! We will not sell it for any price! Build the mosque on it. We are happy.'

But the Messenger of Allah refused to do this. He bought the yard from them and insisted on paying for it.

The Muslims built the mosque with the Messenger of Allah working alongside them. He carried the bricks to the builders with his own hands. One of the Muslims said: 'If we were to sit while the Prophet is working it would be a sinful act.'

As the Muslims were building the mosque they repeated: 'O Allah, there is no life but the life of the Next World, so have mercy on the *Ansar* and *Muhajirin*.'

Only the Mosque of al-Haram at Makkah is more revered than this mosque which the Messenger of Allah laid out as a rectangular building with his living quarters next to it. When he passed away, his body was buried under the floor of the house.

The Caliph 'Uthman, who was the Prophet's son-in-law, added to the mosque and many Caliphs after him have also built onto it. Caliph al-Walid b. Abdul Malik enlarged the mosque and included the tomb of the Prophet within its enclosure.

The rectangular mosque enclosure has five minarets and a beautiful green dome before the *qiblah* wall. In this majestic mosque thousands of Muslims can pray together. Allah decreed that Muslims should visit this mosque and pray in it. ﷺ

5
Not Too Young For Martyrdom

When the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was going to Badr to fight the idol-worshippers, a boy named 'Umayr ibn Abi Waqqas wanted to join him but he was only sixteen years old.

'Umayr was afraid that the Prophet would refuse to let him go to fight because he was so young. He tried to keep out of sight so that the Prophet would not spot him.

However, his eldest brother, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, saw him. He asked: 'What is wrong with you, brother? Why are you hiding like that?'

'Umayr said: 'I am afraid that the Messenger of Allah will send me back. I know I am young, but I want to go as well. Perhaps Allah will grant me martyrdom.'

As 'Umayr feared, when the Messenger of Allah saw him, he said that he was too young. Fighting is not the business of children and boys. What can they do in war when it is hard even for men?

But 'Umayr did not want to be left behind. He did not want to sit in the house or be left to play with his friends in Madinah. He wanted martyrdom in the way of Allah.

Of course, 'Umayr would not disobey the Messenger of Allah. He only wanted Allah's pleasure and he knew that he would never gain Allah's pleasure by opposing His Messenger.

'Umayr was confused and very sad. Though he was not old enough to go to fight, he yearned for martyrdom and to die in the way of Allah. He yearned for Paradise. He thought martyrdom was close but how could he attain it when he had not even attained an age when he could fight?

This problem weighed heavily on 'Umayr and he started to cry. When the Messenger of Allah saw his tears his heart melted and he allowed 'Umayr to go to Badr after all.

'Umayr was so happy when the Prophet gave him permission. It was as if he had been given a ticket to Paradise.

'Umayr set off with his brother and the other tall, strong Muslims. What he had yearned for, happened and he died a martyr at Badr.

Allah was well pleased with 'Umayr, the boy who had persevered to fight for Islam. ﷺ

6

A Good Turn for Islam

Only two years after the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, founded the Islamic community in Madinah, the Muslims were forced to fight the idol-worshippers. The two sides confronted one another at a place called Badr where a fierce battle took place.

'Abdur-Rahman ibn 'Awf said: 'While I was at Badr, two boys of the *Ansar*, Mu'adh ibn 'Afra' and Mu'awwidh ibn 'Afra' were standing on either side of me.

'I turned to one of them and he whispered quietly so that his brother would not hear: "Uncle! Do you know Abu Jahl?"

'Yes', I said, 'what do you want from him, nephew?'

'I have been told that he cursed the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. Show him to me, uncle! I have made a pact with Allah that if I see him I will kill him or die in the attempt.'

'His brother also whispered to me so that his brother would not hear: "Show him to me, uncle! I have made

a pact with Allah that if I see him I will strike him with my sword until I kill him."

'At that point Abu Jahl passed by. "Look", I said. "There goes Abu Jahl." The boys set upon him like two falcons.

'Then they went to the Prophet and told him what they had done.'

He asked: 'Which of you killed him?'

'I killed him', they answered together.

'Have you checked your swords?'

'No.'

The Prophet examined the two swords. 'Both of them killed him', he said.

This man whom the Muslims called Abu Jahl, which means 'the father of ignorance' had been one of the worst enemies of Islam. He was totally ruthless and took terrible revenge on anyone who dared to oppose him.

Through his wealth and brutality he had become powerful in Makkah. Because he did not want to lose his position he had tried to stop the Message of Allah from spreading.

He had denounced the Prophet as a sorcerer and had been violently hostile to him. All the Muslims were relieved when he was killed and the Prophet said: 'This Abu Jahl was the Pharaoh of this community.'

7
Young and Keen

When the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, left for Uhud to fight the Quraysh some young boys who were not more than fifteen years old accompanied him. The men did not want the extra responsibility of looking after them during the fighting and the Prophet decided to send them back because they were so young.

One of the boys, Rafi' ibn Khadij, was under fifteen but he made himself appear taller. He was determined to make people think he was old enough to fight.

However, the Prophet sent him back because he knew how young he really was. When his father spoke up for him, saying: 'My son Rafi', is an archer', the Messenger of Allah relented and allowed him to go.

Rafi' was extremely happy to get the Messenger of Allah's permission to go to fight. Then another boy, Samurah ibn Jundub, who was the same age as Rafi', presented himself to the Messenger of Allah. The Prophet decided to send him back because he was so young. Samurah said: 'You have given Rafi' permission but you are sending me back yet I could have thrown Rafi' if I had wrestled with him.'

Samurah and Rafi' were ordered to wrestle and Samurah threw Rafi' just as he said he would. So he too was given permission to join the fighters and he fought in the way of Allah in the Battle of Uhud.

May Allah be pleased with Rafi' and Samurah. May their bravery be an example to us all. ﷺ

8

Second Chance

Some Muslims were left behind when the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, set out for Badr to fight the idol-worshippers. More than 300 men went with him but those who were busy tending their camels, watering their crops and working in their shops did not realise that the others had left.

Among the men who were left in Madinah was Anas ibn an-Nadr. He was very keen to fight in the way of Allah and was eager for martyrdom. He would not have left the Prophet's side if he had known that he would miss the battle. He was very sad to have missed that opportunity to fight.

At the Battle of Badr, just 313 Muslims defeated 1,000 Quraysh who were on horseback. The idol-worshippers were filled with shame. They were so proud of their horsemanship and their fighting ability that they had to find some way to save their pride.

The Quraysh decided to make up for their defeat by taking revenge on the Muslims. When the Prophet heard that the enemy had left Makkah and was heading for Madinah he gathered his Companions together and

asked: 'What do you think? Shall we stay and fight on home ground or set off to meet them?'

The Prophet and the older men believed it would be better to stay in Madinah but the younger men who thought they should go out to demonstrate their bravery won the debate.

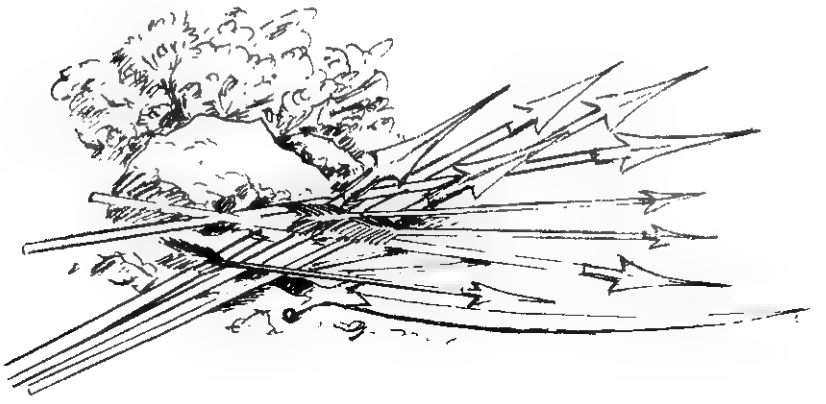
This time, 700 Muslims including fifty horsemen set off. 'Abdullah ibn Jubayr was put in charge of the fifty archers and the Prophet commanded them to protect the rear of the Muslim army and to hold their positions no matter what happened.

The battle went well for the Muslims and the Quraysh started to retreat. However, the archers ignored their orders to hold their positions. With shouts of 'Booty! Booty!' they raced to collect what the idol-worshippers had abandoned.

Though 'Abdullah ibn Jubayr remained at his post along with just a few of his companions, when the enemy horsemen regrouped and charged at the Muslim army he was helplessly outnumbered. He was among the seventy Muslims martyred that day at Uhud.

The Prophet and the Muslims with him stood firm but the idol-worshippers fought their way very close to the Prophet. They injured the Prophet's face, broke one of his teeth and pelted him with stones until he fell into a pit. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Talhah ibn 'Ubaydullah came to the Prophet's rescue.

They found that two links of the Prophet's helmet were embedded in his face. Abu 'Ubaydah struggled to pull the links apart using his teeth. In the process his own teeth were wrenched out.



Ten of the Companions were martyred as they stood around the Prophet trying to protect him. Seven more took their place and they, too, were killed. There was great confusion. A rumour spread that the Prophet had been killed. Many people were in despair and gave up fighting. Anas ibn an-Nadr, the man who had missed the battle at Badr, continued to fight on bravely. He passed by some Muslims who were sitting around in despair and asked them: 'What are you waiting for?'

'The Messenger of Allah has been killed', they answered.

Anas retorted: 'There is no point in living without him. You may as well get up and die, like he did.'

When Anas saw Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, he told him: 'I feel that Paradise is here at Uhud.' He went towards the enemy and fought bravely and fiercely until he met his death.

The Muslims who later found Anas said that they could not recognise him as he had more than eighty wounds caused by spear points, arrows and sword blows. The idol-worshippers had also mutilated his body. Only his sister was able to identify him.

Anas ibn an-Nadr died fighting in the way of Allah just as he wanted. ﷺ

9
The Idol-Worshippers Take Revenge

One day the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, decided to send a group of Muslims into enemy territory. He wanted them to find out what the idol-worshippers were up to. He knew that the enemy would be on the look-out for Muslims so he selected ten men who were willing to give their lives in the way of Allah.

The men's families and friends in Madinah realised that terrible dangers lay ahead as they said tender farewells to one another. 'Good-bye', they said. 'Until we meet again.' They knew that they might not meet again in this world.

The group, led by 'Asim ibn Thabit al-Ansari, set off towards Makkah. At a place called Had'a, between 'Usfan and Makkah, they were spotted by one of the enemy. He ran off to report: 'I have seen some Muslim men coming this way! There are not more than ten of them. Do you know about them?'

A man from the Banu Lihyan replied: 'No! We do not know! You will be well rewarded for bringing us this information. Only ten men, you say? Well, that is

equal to 100. Did you see how 300 of them defeated the Quraysh army at Badr? We will never forget that they killed our best leaders there. We will take our revenge.'

About 100 men from the Banu Lihyan armed with spears were sent towards Had'a. They asked everyone they met: 'Have you seen any Muslim men around here? Have you seen anyone praying?'

They received enough information about the Muslim party to set them in the right direction. They were quite close to 'Asim and his companions before they became aware of them and the Muslims had little time in which to take cover.

The idol-worshippers surrounded the Muslims. They shouted: 'Come out! Shake hands with us! If you do, we give you our word that we will not kill you.'

'Asim knew that the Muslims could not trust the unbelievers. He remembered the warning given by Almighty Allah: '*They do not respect in you the ties either of kinship or covenant with the unbelievers*' (9: 8).

'Asim also remembered an occasion when the unbelievers had gone to the Messenger of Allah and asked: 'Can we have some men to teach us the Qur'an and Sunnah?' In good faith the Prophet had sent seventy men who could recite Allah's word to help them. Before these Muslims had even reached their destination the unbelievers had killed them.

'Asim replied: 'I cannot come out. I cannot trust the word of unbelievers.' Then he added: 'O Allah! Tell Your Messenger about what has happened to us.'

The idol-worshippers were so angered by 'Asim's reply that they at once attacked the group of Muslims.

'Asim and six of his companions were martyred.

The idol-worshippers in Makkah had been eager for 'Asim's blood ever since he had killed two of their standard-bearers at Uhud. When they heard that he had been killed at Had'a they demanded a piece of his body as proof that it really was 'Asim.

But Allah protected 'Asim's body from the unbelievers. A swarm of bees formed a canopy above the martyr's body. The unbelievers were so frightened when they saw the bees giving him protection that they would not go close enough to the body to mutilate it.

The Muslims who had survived the attack said to one another: 'If we are all killed no one will be able to tell the Prophet what has happened.'

Three of them decided to trust the enemy. However when they gave themselves up and offered to shake hands, the unbelievers grabbed them and tied them up.

The fourth man said: 'I will not go along with this. I have just seen what you did to those three.' The unbelievers then dragged him along, trying to force him to go with them. When he continued to struggle, they killed him.

The three captives were then taken to Makkah to be sold. One of them, Khubayb, had killed the Quraysh leader, al-Harith ibn 'Amir, at the Battle of Badr. When al-Harith's sons heard that Khubayb had been captured by the Banu Lihyan, they bought him in order to kill him in revenge for their father's death.

While Khubayb was being held by the Banu'l Harith he borrowed a razor so that he could shave to be clean to meet his Lord. He knew that he had not many days left in this world.

A little boy, whose mother was a daughter of the man Khubayb had killed, was playing nearby. The toddler went up to Khubayb who lifted him gently onto his knee. When his mother saw her child being held by Khubayb who was also holding the razor, she was very frightened.

'Do not worry', Khubayb assured her. 'I am not going to harm him. I would never do that.'

This woman had not met a believer before this incident. She did not know about a Muslim's high standards of behaviour. No one had told her that Muslims are forbidden from killing children or from attacking old men and women on the battlefield, let alone inside houses.

The Banu'l Harith gave Khubayb only just enough food to keep him alive while he was waiting to be killed. He was a shackled captive waiting to die in the way of

Allah. Yet, he received fruits that were out of season. Al-Harith's daughter said: 'One day I found him eating grapes when there were none in Makkah.' She also said: 'Allah is providing Khubayb with this food.' In the Holy Qur'an Allah says: '*A gift of welcome from the Forgiving, the Merciful*' (41: 32).

Khubayb's good character and fine example while he was a captive did not influence the unbelievers. They ignored what they saw and heard and went ahead with their plan to kill him.

They took Khubayb outside the Haram to kill him as if that would make it look more lawful. When Khubayb realised that he was soon to die he asked: 'Let me pray two *rak'ats*', and the enemy agreed. After his two *rak'ats* were completed he said: 'I wanted to make my prayer longer. I wanted to stand longer before my

Lord but I thought you would only say, "Khubayb has made his prayer last a long time because he is afraid of dying. He is trying to delay his death." '

Khubayb continued: 'I'm here, now. Go ahead!' Then he added: 'O Allah! Count them by number and kill them one by one. Do not let even one of them escape.'

Khubayb then recited: '*I do not mind, so long as I am killed as a Muslim, what kind of death I suffer for the sake of Allah.*'

The unbelievers then placed Khubayb on a wooden platform. They stood around him stabbing him with spears as they tested his loyalty to the Messenger of Allah. 'Khubayb', they shouted, 'would you like Muhammad to be in your place?'

Khubayb called back to his tormentors: 'By Allah! I do not want to be saved, not even by a single thorn that might hurt his foot.'

Although the idol-worshippers were astounded by his words they continued their relentless torture until Khubayb died as a martyr for his faith.

10

Change of Mind

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, sent a group of his Companions to call on some people to invite them to Islam. Seventy good Muslims were in the expedition which included Haram ibn Milhan who was killed by an idol-worshipper named Jabbar ibn Sulma. No one expected a man like Jabbar to embrace Islam, but to everyone's amazement he soon became a Muslim.

When he was asked the reason, he replied: 'In battle I faced a Muslim called Haram ibn Milhan. I stabbed him between his shoulders with a spear and I saw the point emerge from his chest. Then I heard him say: "I have won, by the Lord of the *Ka'bah*!"

'I asked: "What does this mean? Am I dreaming or is he a liar?"

'A man does not lie when he is dying even if he lies at other times. He certainly does not lie when he is close to death. Anyway, Arabs do not lie.'

Jabbar ibn Sulma was both amazed and bewildered by what Haram ibn Milhan had uttered. He said to himself: 'I stabbed a man with a spear, and the spear

went in one side and came out the other, and he fell down covered with blood and drew his last breath, saying: "I have won, by the Lord of the *Ka'bah*!"

'This man knew that his wife would be left a widow and his children would be orphans. He would be deprived of every pleasure in this world. He would have neither food nor drink. He would no longer see the light of the sun or moon. He would no longer join in conversation. He would have nothing now but the dark pit of his grave. So what was this victory?

'I asked one of the Muslims about what he had said. He told me, "It was martyrdom. He believed in Allah and the Last Day and he knew of true happiness, the pleasure of Allah, and the bliss of the Garden which the martyr wins. It was as if he was already seeing it when he exclaimed, 'I have won, by the Lord of the *Ka'bah*!' "

'I said: "By Allah, he has won." '

So Jabbar ibn Sulma discovered that another world exists beyond this world. Beyond the pleasures and joys which are experienced here there are even greater and sweeter pleasures. These blessings never end and life goes on forever. Allah, the Glorious and Exalted, says: '*No person knows what delights of the eyes are kept hidden for them as a reward for their deeds*' (32: 17). And He says: '*Do not think of those killed in the way of Allah as dead. Nay, they live, finding provision in the*

presence of their Lord, rejoicing in the bounty provided by Allah' (3: 169).

Only a few simple words spoken from the heart of a believer changed this man. Before that moment he did not believe in Allah and His Messenger and the Last Day but he came to accept the *din* of the man he had killed – the *din* which he had once fought against. A sincere expression of faith can produce wonders, defeat armies and conquer lands. ﷺ

11

A Message to the Prophet

When a relative or friend comes to you and says: 'As I am travelling back home and I will be meeting your father, would you like me to do anything for you? Is there a message I can take to him?', you do not doubt that he will meet your father and that your father will ask for news about you and about your health. So you say: 'Give my father my greetings and tell him that I am well, and in good health and spirits.'

That is what the Muslims believed regarding death – that it was merely a bridge to the Next World. Any Muslims who crossed this bridge would reach the Next World to be with the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. He would regard it as an honour to visit him. The Messenger of Allah would be sure to ask about his community.

It is possible that your relative or friend may fail to reach your homeland or he may get there and be unable to meet your father. But the Muslims did not doubt that a dead person would reach the Next World and that a martyr would meet the Messenger of Allah.

When the Muslims advanced against Syria, the

Messenger of Allah told them: 'You will conquer the treasures of Chosroes and Caesar.' Allah promised them victory, and said that the Muslim armies would have His assistance. He said: '*Our armies must surely conquer*' (37: 173). They were certain of victory and conquest and indeed that was what happened. They conquered city after city and defeated army after army.

On the day of the Battle of Yarmuk, a man came to Abu 'Ubaydah, the Muslim general, and said: 'I have prepared for my end – that is, martyrdom. Do you have any message for the Messenger of Allah?'

Abu 'Ubaydah said: 'Yes! Give him my greetings and say, "Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless you and your family and grant them peace! We have found what our Lord promised us to be true!"' ﷺ

12

Self-Denial

When Sayyiduna Abu Bakr Siddiq, may Allah be pleased with him, was the Muslim Caliph ruling a vast empire which included all the Arabian peninsula and part of Syria, he took from the State Treasury only enough to feed himself and his family.

He had been a merchant before he became Caliph. His new duties made it impossible for him to continue trading so he had to take money from the Treasury as he had no time to earn to keep himself and his family. It was in the best interests of the Muslims that he did this as it enabled him to spend all his time on his state duties.

He took from the Treasury just enough to provide bread and flavourings to keep him and his family alive. His wife was not able to vary their diet or increase the amount of their food as happened among the rich families and those to whom Allah had given ample provision. His wife and children had been better off when he – the *Siddiq* – had been a merchant.

Abu Bakr's young children had just enough food to satisfy their hunger. They could not afford sweets and

fruits like the other children of their age in Madinah, whose parents had businesses and gardens.

Their tender-hearted mother was aware of this. One day she decided she would like her young children to have some sweets. She asked her husband to increase their allowance from the Treasury so that she could buy them.

He said: 'The Treasury is the property of the Muslims, and among them are poor people and people in great need. There is not enough in the Treasury to satisfy individual cravings for extra food and drink.'

She asked: 'If I were to save up from our allowance would there then be anything to stop us from buying sweets from our savings?'

He replied: 'There is no harm in that. That money would come from your own efforts.'

Abu Bakr's wife then saved up from her allowance over a number of days. She brought the few dirhams she had saved to Abu Bakr and said: 'Here are some dirhams so you can buy some sweets.'

But Abu Bakr only returned the dirhams to the Treasury. He said to the man in charge: 'We have discovered that our family can live and remain strong with fewer dirhams than we normally receive, so reduce our allowance to the value of these dirhams. They were extra to what we need. The Treasury is not for the Caliph's family to enjoy nor to increase his food supply.'

From then on, the daily allowance was reduced. So, that virtuous and happy family, whose master ruled vast lands and to whom came great booty and riches, lost a portion of its budget from the Treasury. They could not even have the sweets they wanted. The wife of the Siddiq was content with her husband's decision. She did not consider it a loss. Allah the Immense spoke the truth: '*Women of purity for men of purity, and men of purity for women of purity*' (24: 26).

Sayyiduna Abu Bakr is a fine example of a Caliph. When he was in charge of the Muslims' affairs, he preferred to economise and to be content with simple food. He practised self-denial and always remembered that '*What is with Allah is better and more lasting*' (42: 36).

Allah was pleased with Abu Bakr and with all the Rightly-Guided Caliphs who put the interests of the Muslim community above their own desires. ﷺ

13

An Unassuming Conqueror

During the ten-year Caliphate of Sayyiduna 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, the Muslim armies were spreading the word of Islam. The conquest of the northern region (Syria and surrounding lands) continued until they reached Jerusalem, where the glorious al-Aqsa Mosque is situated.

The Christians, who ruled Syria and Byzantium at that time, asked that the Caliph should come personally to sign the peace treaty. Then they would surrender to him the keys of Jerusalem. It was a special event because Jerusalem is not like any other city or land. It has a unique importance as it was here that the al-Aqsa Mosque was built by the Prophet Sulayman, peace be upon him.

The al-Aqsa is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an in the story of the Prophet's journey by night from al-Masjid al-Haram in Makkah to al-Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem. Many of Allah's Prophets have prayed here. So the Christians felt that if it was to be surrendered, then it should be surrendered directly to the Caliph, the Muslim leader.

The Commander of the Muslim armies, Sayyiduna Abu 'Ubaydah, sent a message to this effect to Caliph 'Umar, saying: 'The conquest of Jerusalem is dependent on your coming.'

Caliph 'Umar always consulted the Companions about what he should do in important cases such as this. Some of the Companions thought he should refuse in order to spite the Christians, but Sayyiduna 'Ali felt that he should go since so much honour and prestige was associated with the Muslim control of Jerusalem. 'Umar agreed with that opinion and prepared for the journey. He left 'Ali in charge of Madinah and set out for Syria. Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab was feared by the Byzantine and Persian Emperors. Accounts of his conquests had spread to distant lands where people were eager to set eyes on such a famous leader. They had heard of the magnificent processions and trappings that accompanied conquerors who wanted to make a strong impression. They did not know that this great leader was a humble man at heart and had no desire to flaunt his position.

To the surprise of the waiting crowds, Sayyiduna 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, arrived in Syria on an ash-grey camel. His head was exposed to the sun and his feet were dangling down from his saddle without any stirrups. His mantle was a woollen cloak. It served as his saddle in the daytime and as his bed at night. His

saddle-bag was made from a thin striped material filled with fibre. It acted as his saddle-bag while he rode and his pillow when he rested. He wore a coarse shirt which was stained and had a tear on one side. He possessed no other shirt.

In Syria, he said: 'Summon the leader of the people.' When the leader came, he asked: 'Can my shirt be washed and mended and can you lend me a shirt in the meantime?' A shirt made of a soft material was brought to him. When he saw the shirt they handed him he said: 'What is this made of?'

'Linen', they replied.

'What is linen?' he asked, and they told him. He took off his shirt for it to be washed and mended and wore the linen one. When his own shirt was returned to him he took off the borrowed shirt and put on his own.

The leader of the Christians said to him: 'You are the king of the Arabs and this is a land not suited to camels. If you were to wear something better than that old shirt and ride a horse instead of a camel you would have more prestige in the eyes of the Romans.'

Sayyiduna 'Umar replied: 'We are a people whom Allah has made mighty by Islam. We do not seek to please anyone other than Allah.'

This was the behaviour of Sayyiduna 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, the *Amir al-Mu'minin* and

Caliph of the Muslims. Mention of his name made great kings lose sleep and accounts of his conquests spread far and wide. But when he travelled from Madinah to Jerusalem, he demonstrated his faith in Allah. He had no need for displays of pomp and ceremony to influence people.

Allah spoke the truth: '*Honour belongs to Allah and to His Messenger and to the believers, but the hypocrites do not know*' (63: 8). ﷺ

14
One Good Turn Deserves Another

Each of us is able to do good and to be thanked and admired for it. Those who are known for their generosity in serving society, helping people in distress, feeding the hungry or offering comfort to the bereaved, are praised and their virtues are acknowledged. They are told: 'You have done well! May Allah repay you well!'

But people vary in their reactions to good deeds. One man who understood the value of a good deed was al-Hasan, son of the Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, and of Fatimah az-Zahra', daughter of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. In both character and physique he closely resembled the Messenger of Allah, who said of him: 'This grandson of mine is a master of men.'

One day when al-Hasan was passing by a garden in Madinah he saw a black man, a slave, with a loaf of bread in his hand, eating a piece and then giving a piece to a dog. He, himself, consumed only half the loaf.

It was certainly an unusual sight. Perhaps the man had only this loaf to last him all day yet he was still

giving the dog half of it. The dog's master probably fed it as well. In any case the dog could fend for itself or it could have found scraps from its master's table.

This strange sight caught the attention of Sayyiduna al-Hasan and he stopped to ask the slave: 'What made you share your food with a dog? You did not give it any less than you took for yourself.'

The man could not have known that anyone was watching him and the dog could not complain nor did it have any right over him. He answered: 'My eyes would have been shamed by the dog's eyes if I had cheated it.' This heart-stirring answer really impressed Sayyiduna al-Hasan who had inherited the noble character of his grandfather about whom it is said: '*Thou standest on an exalted standard of character*' (68: 4).

He asked the man: 'Whose slave are you?'

'I am the slave of Aban ibn 'Uthman.'

'And the garden?'

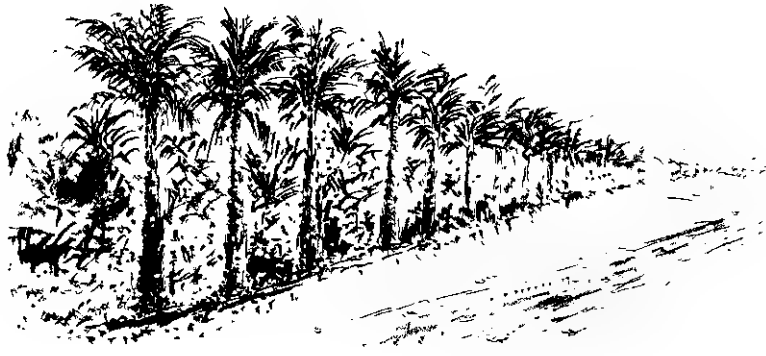
'It belongs to Aban.'

Al-Hasan said: 'Please stay here until I return.'

He went away and bought both the slave and the garden. We cannot calculate how much he would have paid for them.

When he returned to the slave he said to him: 'I have bought you.'

The slave stood up and said: 'Obedience belongs to Allah and His Messenger and to you, my master.'



Al-Hasan then said: 'I have also bought the garden. You are free for the sake of Allah, and the garden is a gift from me to you.'

You can imagine the slave's astonishment. He was filled with joy. In just a few minutes he had become free and he was also the owner of a large and valuable garden.

15

A Great Ruler's Thriftiness

One hundred years after the *Hijrah*, Sayyiduna 'Umar ibn 'Abdu'l'Aziz was the Rightly-Guided Umayyad Caliph. He was the greatest ruler of his time. His empire included Syria, Egypt and the Arabian peninsula, Northwest Africa, Iran and Khorasan extending to the borders of India. When he was appointed Caliph, he gave all his property and estates to Muslims and put his wife's jewellery in the state Treasury.

Despite his immense power he insisted on living a very simple life and allowed himself no more than two dirhams a day. He wasted nothing. He believed that he needed only one shirt and sometimes he was late for Friday prayer because he had to wait for this one shirt to dry after being washed.

He would put out a lamp whose oil came from the Treasury if someone asked him a personal question such as: 'How are you, Amir al-Mu'minin and how is your family?' He would extinguish the lamp and ask for one of his own to be lit or continue the conversation in the dark, since it referred to himself and not to state affairs.

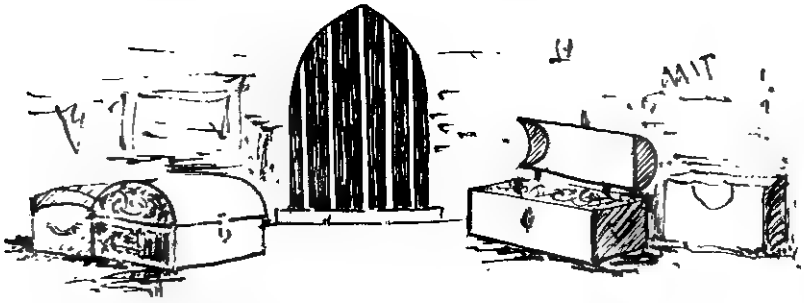
On one occasion he noticed that each time he spoke

to his daughters they would put a hand in front of their face when they turned towards him. He asked why they were doing that. They apologised and explained that they could only find lentils and onions to eat and they were afraid that the smell of their breath would reach him. He wept when he heard these words.

'My daughters! How would you benefit from eating a more varied diet if it meant that your father would go to the Fire?', he asked.

They were silent. They knew that they should accept their father's frugal habits even though he was the greatest ruler of his time and his governors and many of his subjects, especially in the cities, enjoyed feasting, expensive clothes and a good lifestyle. He did not confine his thriftiness to himself and his family, but made it a general policy. His ministers and his governors were expected to be sparing towards themselves and generous to the Muslim community. He told them that money is like blood and should only be allowed to flow in veins other than their own.

One of his governors asked him for paper on which to list the priorities of those he governed. He advised him: 'Use a pen with a fine nib, write the lines close together and concentrate as many of their needs as you can onto one page. Muslims should not use excess of words which can harm their Treasury. Peace be upon you.'



One governor complained to him about the loss from Treasury funds because the *jizyah* or poll tax paid by non-Muslims had been removed from people who became Muslim. Muslims do not pay *jizyah*, it is paid only by non-Muslims living in a Muslim state. He exclaimed: 'Allah – may His praise be glorified – sent Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, as a caller to Islam. He did not send him as a tax collector.'

16

Extreme Humility

Whenever we draw people's attention to something we are proud of we delight in their praise. This is human nature and no one is to be blamed for it.

But the Muslims who learned from the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and absorbed true Islamic teachings were not like this. They performed extraordinary actions yet they remained free from vanity and self-praise.

When the Muslims conquered al-Mada'in, the capital of the Persian Sassanid empire was considered to be the greatest treasure at that time. They captured vast territories and took much booty.

The Arabs were camel herders. They lived in tents and enjoyed a simple lifestyle. When they captured al-Mada'in and collected the booty, a man brought a box of treasure and handed it over to the army general. The people around him exclaimed: 'We have never seen anything like it; it is not like anything we have, not even remotely.' They asked the man whether he had taken anything from the treasure for himself.

He replied: 'Of course not. Had it not been for God, I would not have brought this box to you.'

They then began to realise that this was a man of importance. 'Who are you?', they inquired.

'He replied: 'No, by Allah, I will not tell you in case you praise me, nor will I tell anyone else in case they flatter me. I praise Allah and I am pleased with His reward.'

The people were still curious about his identity. They sent someone to follow him until he reached his companions. It was found that the man was 'Amir ibn 'Abd Qays.

Allah spoke the truth: '*Whether you conceal something or show it, Allah knows it.*' (3: 29). ﷻ

17

A Generous Hero

The victorious king, Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi was a shining example of the wondrous signs of Allah. He repelled the invading European Christian Crusaders, forced them to retreat, and recaptured Jerusalem, Palestine and Syria from them.

After the Battle of Hittin, in 583 AH/1187 CE, which brought an end to the Crusader kingdom of Palestine, the time for the reconquest of Jerusalem drew near. The Sultan had yearned for this opportunity for many years. Qadi Ibn Shaddad said: 'Jerusalem had an importance for him which mountains could not move.'

On 27 Rajab that year, the Sultan entered Jerusalem. After ninety years in Christian hands this first *qiblah* in which the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, prayed with the Prophets during the Night Journey was returned to Islam and Muslim protection. Allah had decreed that the Sultan would enter Jerusalem on the very same day that He had honoured the Prophet there with his ascension through the heavens.

Ibn Shaddad said: 'The Sultan was very manly,

generous, and modest, with a cheerful countenance towards all his guests. He showed respect to anyone who visited him, even if he was an unbeliever. He felt sympathy for people who had been wronged and he would help the victims of injustice. When the ruler of Sidon came to him at Nazareth I saw the respect he paid him and he also ate with him. In addition, he offered him Islam. He pointed out to him its good qualities and encouraged him to embrace it.'

Ibn Shaddad also said: 'One day I was riding in his service against the Christian Crusaders. One of the scouts arrived with a woman who was in great fear, weeping profusely and beating her breast. The scout said: "This woman has come from the Crusaders. She has asked to come before you and so we have brought her." He commanded an interpreter to ask her to relate her story.

'She said: "Yesterday, Muslim thieves entered my tent and stole my daughter. I spent the whole of last night looking for her, right up until dawn. The scout said to me: 'The Sultan is very merciful.' So they brought me here to you. You are the only person who can help me find my daughter."

'The Sultan was moved by the woman's distress, his eyes filled with tears as his chivalrous nature was stirred. He sent someone to the army market to find out who had bought the little girl and to buy her back.

He had only heard about her case that morning, but within an hour the rider returned with the girl on his shoulders. As soon as she saw her daughter the mother fell to the ground, weeping with joy. She raised her eyes to heaven but we did not know what she said. Her daughter was returned to her and both were taken back to their military camp.'

Salahuddin died after the *Fajr* prayer on Wednesday, 27 Safar 589 AH/1193 CE.

Ibn Shaddad said: 'The Sultan did not leave any gold or silver in the Treasury except for forty-seven Nasiri dirhams and a piece of gold. He did not leave any personal possessions, no house, property, garden, village, farm nor any other kind of wealth. He died penniless. We could not find anything to pay for his burial rites. We had to take out a loan to pay even for the mud bricks needed for his grave. The clothes for his shroud were brought by the Qadi.' ❦

18

From Darkness Came Light

Seven hundred years ago the Islamic world was torn apart by Mongol raiders from Central Asia. Under their leader Chingiz Khan and his successors, hordes of these savage, ruthless horsemen over-ran and destroyed the magnificent Muslim cities of Bukhara, Samarkand, Merv and Nishapur.

For forty years the Mongols swept through the central states of Islam destroying everything that lay in their path. Once prosperous Muslim lands were plunged into abject poverty by the plundering and the massacres. The Islamic world could not contain such an assault which had no parallel in history.

The poor Muslims were helpless and could only pray to Allah for guidance. Yet, out of this miserable situation great leaders emerged and their far-reaching influences are still remembered today.

The new Mongol empire was divided up into states under the authority of the elected great Khan in Mongolia. In Turkestan a young man named Tughluq Timur Khan was the son of the state's ruler. Although he had not been crowned king he was already ruling Turkestan.

This young Khan loved to hunt. He did not allow anyone to enter the area which he had set aside for hunting. All the borders were closely guarded so that he and his young friends could enjoy their sport without hindrance.

One day the Muslim Shaykh Jamaluddin from the city of Bukhara was travelling that way with a group of merchants. They did not know that they had strayed onto land that was protected for the ruler's sport until they were caught by the royal guard.

The young ruler ordered that the travellers' feet and hands be bound together and that the men should be brought to him. When they were standing before him he shouted at them: 'How dare you come onto my land?'

The Shaykh told him: 'We are strangers here. We did not realise that we were travelling on protected land.'

'Where are you from?' the ruler asked.

'We are Persians', said the Shaykh.

The ruler snorted: 'A dog is worth more than a Persian.'

The Shaykh said: 'Yes. We would be worth less than a dog if it were not for the fact that we know the Truth. We have *din*.'

The ruler was puzzled by the Shaykh's reply. While he was away hunting he kept thinking about what it meant. When he returned from the hunt he sent for the Shaykh again.

'What did you mean about having something called *din*?' he asked. The Shaykh explained that he was a Muslim and he told the ruler all about Islam. Allah inspired the Shaykh's words and the ruler's heart melted.

The ruler asked the Shaykh many questions about Islam and he realised that he was hearing the Truth. However, he told the Shaykh: 'If I embrace Islam now, I will not be able to guide my people to the Straight Path. Wait until I am King then come back to see me.'

Shaykh Jamaluddin returned home but he became seriously ill. Just before he died he called his son, Rashiduddin, to him and said: 'Do not forget to go to see Tughluq Timur. Soon he will be a great king. Give him my greetings and remind him of the promise he made to me.'

Rashiduddin arrived at Tughluq Timur's military camp soon after he had been crowned King. He did not know how he could get close enough to the King to pass on his father's message. The King was always protected by his guards. Then he had an idea.

Rashiduddin decided to call the *adhan* early the next morning. He crept as close as he could to the King's sleeping quarters and the sound of the *adhan* woke up the King. He shouted angrily: 'Whose voice is that? Who has dared to wake me up?'

The guards told the King: 'It was a Persian calling out at the top of his voice. He says he was calling the

adhan according to his *din*. He was also praying.'

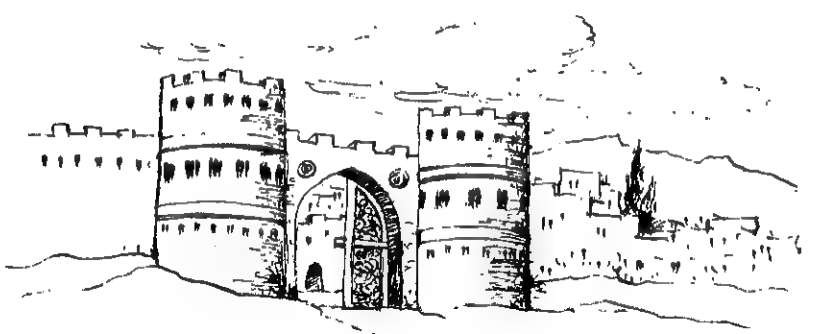
'Bring this Persian to me!' commanded the King. Rashiduddin came to the King and passed on his father's message which included the reminder of the promise the King had made.

'Yes', the King said. 'It is true. I have not forgotten. But what is wrong with the honourable Shaykh? Why did he not come back to see me?'

'He has died recently. Now he is in the Next World', replied Rashiduddin.

The King listened to the news with mixed feelings of sorrow and joy. He was sorry to hear that the Shaykh had died but he was pleased to become a Muslim. He said the *Shahadah* (testimony of faith), and offered Islam to his ministers who also embraced Islam.

The simple but sincere words of Shaykh Jamaluddin had influenced a powerful King. Islam soon spread throughout one of the most important Mongol dynasties. From the darkness came the light of Islam.



19
A Wise Decision

Throughout the world stories are told of brave Muslims who have been imprisoned, tortured or martyred for their belief. A story from India tells of a Muslim who, through no fault of his own, was under great pressure to make a difficult decision. Wisely, he chose to be guided by Allah and he made the right choice.

Two hundred years ago, Imam Sayyed Ahmad was struggling to set up a strong Muslim community in India. Weak government and corrupt rulers had no time for religion and they made life very difficult.

Sayyed Ahmad had a servant called Lahori who was responsible for feeding and looking after the horses that were used by the Muslims in battle. One day, Lahori quarrelled with a respected fighter in the advance guard named Inayatullah who picked up an iron bar and brought it down on Lahori's head. The blow knocked Lahori to the ground and he rolled around in agony.

When news of the incident reached Imam Sayyed Ahmad he took immediate action. He was annoyed with Inayatullah and accused him of taking advantage of his position. He said: 'You probably only dared to do this because of your high standing, whereas Lahori only

has a menial job. But do not be deceived! In my eyes the two of you are equal.'

Sayyed Ahmad went on: 'Neither of you is superior to the other. People only come into this community for the sake of Allah.'

When the Qadi was called in to give judgement on the case the Imam told him: 'Do not be either harsh or lenient with either of them. Judge between them according to Allah's guidance.'

The matter was resolved by Lahori being told he could retaliate by striking Inayatullah on the head just as he himself had been hit. However, the Muslims were not happy with this judgement. They feared that if Lahori struck Inayatullah he might hit Lahori back and make matters even worse than they were already.

Instead, Lahori was asked to excuse Inayatullah. The Qadi said to Lahori: 'If you excuse him and give up your right to strike him back, you will gain Allah's reward. But if you strike him, you will be in the same position as he is, and you will deserve neither thanks nor reward.'

The Qadi then reminded Lahori of Allah's words in the Holy Qur'an: '*If a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah*' and '*If any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs*' (42: 41, 43).

Lahori asked the Qadi: 'If I use my right, and retaliate, will it be a sin?'

'No', replied the Qadi, who then quoted the words of Allah: '*And whoso defendeth himself after he hath suffered wrong. For such, there is no way (of blame) against them*' (42: 41).

By then the Muslim bystanders had given up all hope of a satisfactory conclusion to the matter but the Qadi persevered. He made Inayatullah stand in front of Lahori, then said to Lahori: 'Here he is! Strike him just like he struck you. Come on! Retaliate!'

Lahori turned to the Qadi and asked: 'Have I the right to strike him?'

'Yes', said the Qadi.

By now the bystanders were becoming anxious. They were certain that Lahori would strike Inayatullah. Instead, Lahori turned towards them and said: 'In front of you all, I testify that the Qadi has given me the right to strike Inayatullah. No one can stop me. I am not frightened. But, my brothers, I have now forgiven him and I have given up my right to retaliate, in order to seek the Pleasure of Almighty Allah and His reward.'

To everyone's astonishment Lahori then threw his arms around Inayatullah. He hugged him and they shook hands to cement their friendship.

The people called out: 'May Allah preserve you, Lahori! You have behaved like a hero!' ❦

20

True to Their Faith

India has a rich Islamic history. Three hundred years ago travellers returning to Europe from India had wonderful tales to tell. They described mighty emperors who had almost limitless power, fantastic wealth and splendour, magnificent palaces and cities, exotic flower gardens and a love of learning and science that was unheard of in the West.

Naturally, the Europeans were eager to see more of this vast Muslim empire ruled by the Great Mughuls. It was not long before the Portuguese and the Dutch started to trade with Indian merchants. Then the French and the British arrived on the scene, competing with one another for trade from this unbelievably wealthy country. Britain's East India Company emerged as the most powerful trading company in the region.

The British set up bases in Madras and Bengal for the export of textiles, sugar, indigo and spices. Armies were sent out from Britain to suppress the Muslim rulers.

The British took control of the whole region. They took responsibility away from the Muslim rulers,

reorganised India's internal affairs and replaced the Islamic system with British laws.

On 2 May 1864 CE/1280 AH, a British judge was presiding over a court in Ambala, a large city in Eastern Punjab. In front of him stood eleven Muslims. They were accused of conspiring against the British government in India.

The court was full of spectators as the case had attracted widespread interest among the Muslims. The men were accused of assisting Imam Sayyed Ahmad ibn 'Irfan Shahid, and the respected *mujahid*, Shaykh Isma'il Shahid, by secretly providing them with money and men from inside India which was under British rule.

They were alleged to have written letters in a secret code and to have gathered support from the Indian people, who were British subjects, to help a rebellion on India's borders with Afghanistan. A Muslim soldier serving in the British army had betrayed four of the men to the authorities.

The court was silent as the judge began to speak. Angrily he addressed a strong, handsome youth: 'You, Ja'far, are intelligent, you have had a good education and you know the law. Yet you have used your brains to plot and rebel against the government. My judgement is that you be executed and all your money and property be confiscated. Your body will not be handed back to

your relations but will be put in a pauper's grave. I will be happy when I hear that you are dead.'

Muhammad Ja'far listened patiently to the judge, then said: 'Everyone is in the hands of Almighty Allah. He gives life and death. You have no power over either. You may even die before me. I do not mind which of us dies first.'

It was obvious that this Muslim youth was not worried about the judgement. He seemed to be recalling the words of a poem which says:

> This is what we have been waiting for – the day when Allah will pay the people in full as they had been warned.

A British officer named Parsons who had first arrested Muhammad Ja'far now approached him. 'What is going on?' asked Parsons. 'You have been given the death sentence yet you still look cheerful.'

'Why should I not be happy when Allah has granted me martyrdom? You will never know how sweet martyrdom is', replied Muhammad.

The judge passed the death sentence on two of the other men, one of whom was a Shaykh. Mawlana Yahya 'Ali Sadiq-puri, the community's *amir*, accepted the sentence with delight. The other condemned man was a youth from Punjab named al-Haj Muhammad

Shafi'. The other prisoners were sentenced to permanent exile.

The three men who had been sentenced to death were locked in a dark, cramped cell without fresh air or sunlight. The gallows for their execution were prepared within earshot but it did not worry them. They continued to pray and to recite the Holy Qur'an.

Meanwhile, the judge who had sentenced them died suddenly and Parsons, the officer who had arrested and beaten Muhammad Ja'far, went insane and died a horrible death in a state of madness.

Naturally, the Europeans were curious about the case and went to the prison to have a look at the men who were awaiting execution. They were surprised to find three cheerful prisoners who willingly told the visitors: 'We are happy because we are martyrs and there is nothing better.'

When the justice department received reports of the prisoners' state of mind the authorities debated what to do next. If the men were executed their happiness would be complete. If they were released they would rebel against the British government again. The authorities only considered what was best for British rule in India. They did not listen to what the Muslims were saying about life and death.

One day the city's governor came to see the condemned men. He read to them the court of appeal's

judgement: 'You want to be hanged so that you can be martyrs but we are not prepared to grant you your desire. Instead, we are going to banish you to permanent exile on islands off Ceylon.'

On 8 December 1865 CE/1282 AH, the three men reached Port Blair in the Andaman islands. Shaykh Yahya 'Ali died there after two years of worshipping Allah and calling people to Him. Shaykh Muhammad Ja'far lived there for eighteen years before he was pardoned and released in 1883. ❦

Adhan: call to prayer.

Ansar: plural of *Ansari*, helper. It is generally used for the people of Madinah who welcomed the Muslims when they emigrated to Madinah, and helped them in every possible way.

Din: religion, the Islamic way of life. The word is derived from *Kama-tadinu-tudanu*, as you sow, you will reap, or *Yaumud-din*, the day of judgement/recompense. It signifies that whatever a person does in this life, its recompense will be received in the life Hereafter.

Fajr: dawn prayer, morning prayer. The prayer which is conducted after dawn and before sunrise.

Hadith: traditions of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, sayings, deeds and silent approvals which mean something was done in his presence or came to his knowledge and he did not oppose it.

Halal: lawful. It refers to things made lawful for Muslims to utilise.

Haram: unlawful/prohibited. It is used for the things which are prohibited and unlawful to use.

Jihad: to struggle in the way of Allah. To serve the Islamic cause which includes fighting in the

way of Allah against His enemies, as and when necessary.

Jizyah: a tax levied on non-Muslim subjects of an Islamic state, against the responsibility of guarding their lives, honour and property. It should be noted that Muslims pay *Zakah* on their property and every able Muslim is subject to be called up for army service whenever the need arises, from which non-Muslims are exempt.

Ka'bah: the House of Allah in Makkah, to which a Muslim who can afford to make the journey to Makkah goes for pilgrimage.

Madinatur-Rasul: the city of the Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace; one of the names of Madinah.

Muhajirin/Muhajirun: plural of *Muhajir*. The emigrant, generally used for the Makkan Companions of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, who migrated to Madinah.

Mujahid: a person who struggles in the way of Allah to serve His cause and fights in His way against the enemies.

Qiblah: direction. It is used for the direction of the *Ka'bah*, to which a Muslim has been asked to face when he prays to Allah.

Rak'at: a unit of performance in regular prayer, *Salah*, which includes recitation of the Qur'an, bowing and prostrating, etc.

Sayyidina/Sayyiduna: master, or leader. An honorific expression used to show respect to a righteous and religious personality.

Shahadah: testimony of faith: 'I testify that there is no god but Allah, and I testify that Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, is His servant and messenger.'

Siddiq: most truthful, a sincere believer. A title given to Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, may Allah be pleased with him, for his superiority in Islam and his firm belief in the message of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

Sirah: biography, life history, generally used for the life of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

Shaykh: a respected person, a pious and spiritual leader or a very knowledgeable person. It is also used as a title for present-day Gulf rulers.

Sunnah: the way of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

Tafsir: explanation, generally used for the science of exegesis of the Qur'an.